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## 'Look, I have my ears open': Resilience and early school experiences among children in an economically deprived suburban area in Ireland

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## **“Look, I have my ears open”: Resilience and early school experiences among children in an economically deprived suburban area in Ireland**

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Children from economically disadvantaged communities frequently lack the socio-emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills needed for successful early school adjustment. Assessments of early school experience often rely on parent and teacher perspectives, yet children's views are essential to design effective, resilience-promoting school ecologies. This mixed methods study explored children's appraisals of potential stressors in the first school year with 25 children from a disadvantaged suburban community in Ireland. School scenarios were presented pictorially (Pictorial Measure of School Stress and Wellbeing, or PMSSW), to elicit children's perspectives on social ecological factors that enable or constrain resilience. Salient positive factors included resource provision, such as food, toys and books; school activities and routines, including play; and relationships with teachers. Negative factors included bullying; difficulties engaging with peers; and using the toilet. Drawing on these factors, we indicate how school psychologists can develop resilience-fostering educational environments for children in vulnerable communities.

**Keywords:** resilience, transitions, PMSSW, disadvantage, children's perspectives, mixed methods, school adjustment

Growing up in families and communities facing poverty involves a confluence of risk factors that may undermine children's school readiness, educational attainment, and physical and mental wellbeing. These risks include the quantity and quality of parental educational, health, and employment resources; parental mental and physical health; the home environment; and the community's norms and collective sense of efficacy (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). As a result, children in disadvantaged communities are often poorly equipped to succeed in early school environments, triggering negative trajectories that can extend through life (Doyle, McEntee, & McNamara, 2012; Lee & Burkham, 2002).

When considering adjustment to school, school readiness research typically focuses on individual child factors. One of the most important of these is children's socio-emotional capacity and self-regulation, which allows children to pay attention, follow directions, interact well with peers and teachers, control negative emotions and behaviours, and develop a sense of belonging and acceptance (Blair & Raver, 2015; Dockett & Perry, 2001). Another socio-emotional factor influencing school success is children's feelings about school; evidence indicates that early negative impressions tend to intensify over time (Ladd, 2009). For some children, early social and economic disadvantage compromises the development of such socio-emotional competencies, as well as of cognitive ability. Thus, these children are likely to require additional supports to adjust successfully to school.

In addition to *individual* child factors, calls have been made to examine how *school ecologies* – communities, parents, schools, and practitioners such as school psychologists – provide high quality early school experiences by promoting sensitive and responsive environments (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Social systems and environments are key to risk and resilience processes, particularly in contexts of adversity (Doyle et al., 2012; Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). School ecologies that foster resilience are those that support academic efficacy, self-determination, behavioural self-control, rewarding peer friendships, caring and authentic teacher-child relationships, and strong home-school connections (Doll, Brehm, & Zucker, 2014). Drawing on Ungar et al.'s (2007) model of pathways to resilience, Theron and Theron (2014) demonstrate students' need for constructive relationships, and for schools to support them in developing a strong identity (including a sense of personal competence recognised by others), ensuring access to material resources including food, and ensuring fair treatment to engender a sense of social justice. However, despite substantial research on early school transitions, and some on resilience-supporting school ecologies, ecologies of resilience within the first school year have rarely been examined.

As children are 'active makers of meaning who interpret adversity using lenses that practitioners need to understand', their perceptions can help adults understand resilience (Wessells, 2015, p. 18). Indeed, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and the Irish National Children's Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives* (National Children's Office, 2000) require children's views to be considered in matters affecting their lives. However, early school experience research often utilises parent or teacher proxy reports. This assumes that adult accounts accord with children's views (Murray, Murray, & Waas, 2008), yet children's views may differ. For example, a school-starting study in Australia found that whereas parents focused on children fitting in and separating from parents, and teachers on the educational environment, children were more preoccupied with having and making friends (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

The value of exploring children's perspectives on early school experience has been demonstrated. Children report difficulty with learning, reading and maths (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2010), peer experiences, saying goodbye to family, and going to the toilet (Murray & Harrison, 2014). They are alert to the structure and rules of the school environment, and are aware that letter and number knowledge, personal and social skills and friendships are helpful for adjusting to school, and that their school and family lives are interconnected (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Peters, 2003).

Despite these insights, studies of early school experiences in contexts of socio-economic disadvantage typically employ standardised development indices or other quantitative measures (e.g., Murray et al., 2008; Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards, & Hayes, 2008) rather than exploring children's subjective experiences. Consequently, children's interpretations of early school experiences in disadvantaged communities remain largely unknown.

## **Aim**

Exploring children's descriptions of early school experiences in a disadvantaged suburban area of Ireland, we seek to consider what can be learned about risk and resilience processes and to draw out implications for schools and school psychologists seeking to create supportive school ecologies in the first school year.

## Method

### *Research context and design*

A quarter of 3-year-olds in the lowest-income families in Ireland demonstrate delays in socio-emotional and behavioural development (Williams, Murray, McCrory, & McNally, 2013). In one disadvantaged community, teacher ratings indicated that almost half of children starting school lacked necessary cognitive and socio-emotional abilities (Kiernan et al., 2008). Investment in early years education (0-5 years) in Ireland is low by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, 0.4% GDP against the average of 0.7% (OECD, 2013), even though primary schools in areas of economic disadvantage receive educational supports, school meals, and reduced student-teacher ratios through the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) scheme (Department of Education and Skills, 2014).

The *Children's Thoughts about School Study* (CTSS) was designed to elicit children's perceptions of early school experiences in a disadvantaged community in Dublin with high rates of early school leaving, unemployment, public housing provision, and lone parent households (Engling & Haase, 2013). The community is currently engaged in a randomised controlled trial (RCT) of an early intervention parenting programme aimed at attenuating the developmental risks of deprivation. Two of the three schools in this community, attended by children from both trial and non-trial families, were purposively selected for the CTSS (the third school was attended by fewer children from the trial, and CTSS measures were piloted in that school). Here, we report the early school experiences of those children whose families did *not* receive the parenting intervention in the RCT. Independent of the RCT, these schools were at various stages of implementing a pilot Play to Learn programme (Preparing for Life, 2014), which encourages teachers to embed play into the curriculum with extended daily play sessions, and adapt classrooms for play.

The CTSS protocol received approval from University College Dublin's human research ethics committee. It employed four methods (see O'Rourke, O'Farrelly, Booth, & Doyle, 2014). Findings for one method, the Pictorial Measure of School Stress and Wellbeing (PMSSW - Murray & Harrison, 2014), are reported in this article. In a mixed methods design (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007), verbal responses to this structured pictorial measure were analysed qualitatively, supplemented by frequency analyses.

### **Participants**

In the two schools, children were recruited from all seven Junior Infant classes (the first year of school, aged 4 or 5 years; each class had 14-18 children,  $N = 110$ ). Teachers, all female, had an average 4.16 years ( $SD = 2.7$ ) teaching experience. After distributing information about the study, we received parent consent documentation from 40% ( $n = 44$ ); 41 children assented and participated.

This article reports on the findings for the children whose families had not participated in the parenting RCT (25 of the 41 participating children): 16 boys and 9 girls aged 55-70 months ( $M = 62.8$  months,  $SD = 4.14$ ; School 1:  $n = 14$ ; School 2:  $n = 11$ ). Nearly two-thirds of families (62%) received social welfare payments; 58% of parents had not completed secondary education; and a parent had paid employment in only 31% of families. They were 96% White Irish, reflecting the ethnoculturally homogenous local community.

### **Procedure**

The procedure was designed to support ethical engagement with young children and the credibility of collected data. Trained researchers read an illustrated booklet to participating children, introducing the researchers, activities, confidentiality limits, and children's right to withdraw. Interviews were conducted with two researcher/child pairs in the same room, yet out of earshot of one another. They were audio recorded, with parent and child permission, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviewers remained alert to participant fatigue or non-responding.

### **Measure**

With young children, whose verbal skills are typically less developed, visual methods may be preferable (Mukherji & Albon, 2010), enhancing the credibility of research. The PMSSW, developed through consultation with children and experts, observation, and existing scales, assesses children's views of potentially stressful school situations (Murray & Harrison, 2005, 2014). The images have blank faces, with the intention that participants will project feelings on to them. Images were adapted (with permission) to reflect typical Irish primary schools; e.g., an image of toilets at the end of a long corridor was changed to two cubicles near the classroom.

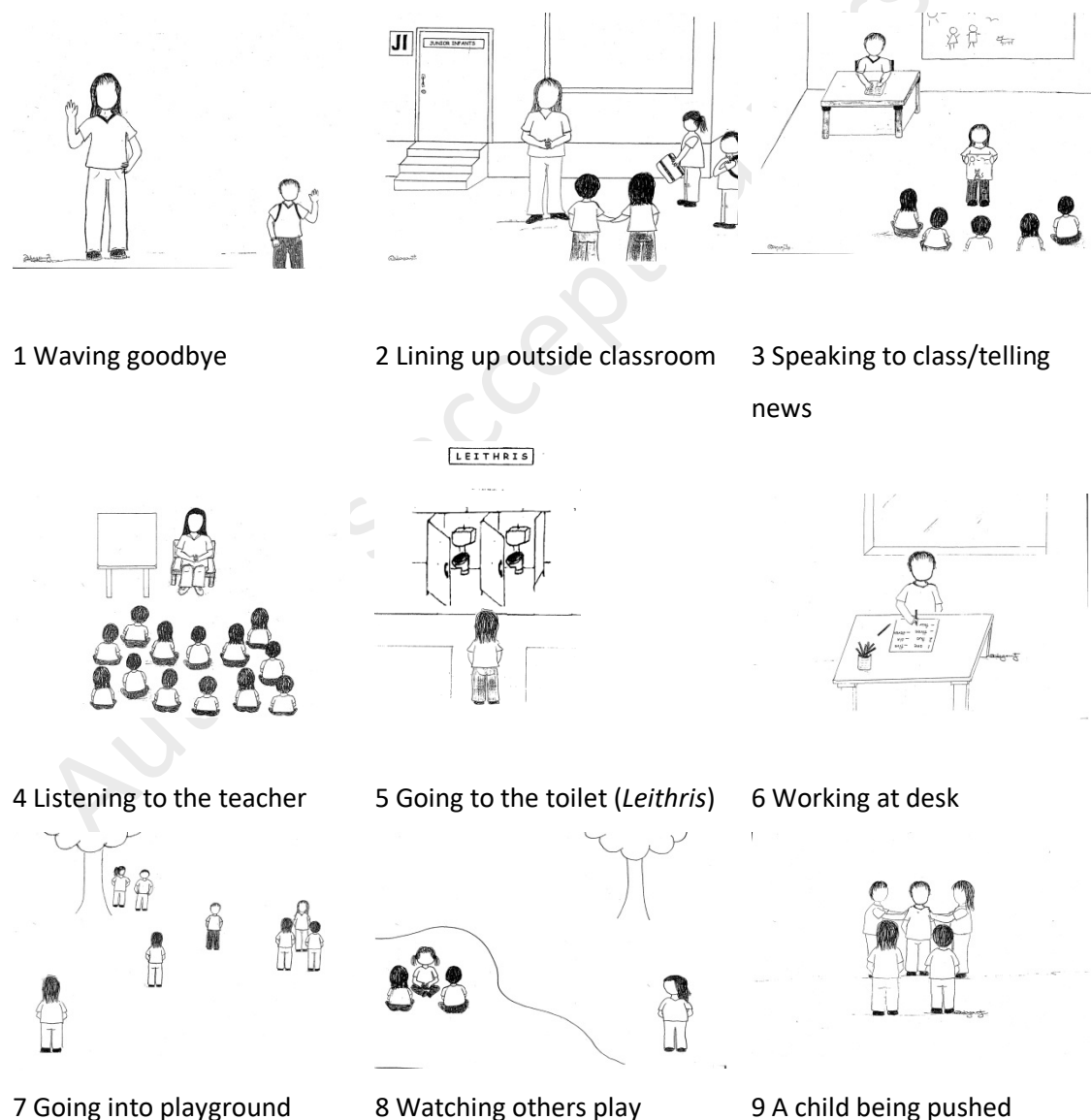
The revised PMSSW, with nine scenarios, was viewed by children in this order: 1. Waving goodbye to a caregiver in the morning; 2. Lining up outside the classroom; 3. Speaking to the class; 4. Sitting on the floor listening to the teacher; 5. Going to the toilet

independently; 6. Doing work at a desk; 7. Entering the playground at lunchtime; 8.

Watching other children play; 9. A child being pushed by other children (see Figure 1).

For each image, participants were asked: *How does the child in the picture feel? Why do they feel that way? Would they tell the teacher how they are feeling? Why would they [not] tell the teacher? What might happen next?*

Participants responded well to the measure, recounting relevant feelings, activities and events. However, children needed clarification of the meaning of some images, and many replied 'don't know' to the final question (about what would happen next), designed to elicit coping strategies.



**Figure 1.** PMSSW (Murray & Harrison, 2014) adapted for the Irish primary school context

### **Data analysis**

Analysis of the data was primarily qualitative. Transcripts were coded deductively (through the lens of school-related resilience research cited above [Doll et al., 2014; Theron & Theron, 2014]) and inductively. Iterative analyses involved the first three authors, all psychologists, but whose different professional and personal backgrounds support analyses' confirmability and credibility. The first author identified codes of meaning, exploring commonalities and differences, and combined these into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second and third authors reviewed codes, themes, and examples. Engaging in 'ongoing reflexive dialogue' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), differences were resolved by discussion, to arrive at consensus that themes reflected the meaning of the data and resilience findings in the literature. All five authors reviewed the final analysis.

Frequency analyses were conducted to indicate how meaning was 'patterned' across the dataset (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015, p. 102). However, response rates were only consistent for the first question, *How does the child in the picture feel?*. Therefore, we restricted frequency analyses to these emotion responses, and to noting children's mentions of school-based learning activities (play, writing, numbers, and reading), noting one instance per child per scenario, to avoid inflating frequencies where children repeated themselves. Frequencies should be considered indicative rather than as definitive evidence of comparative salience.

## **Results**

First, we report on the *range of emotions* children described for each scenario, with frequencies of positive or negative feelings. Subsequent themes, derived from across the nine scenarios, were: *School provides food, books and toys; Feeling competent in play, drawing and learning; School provides structure and expectations of behavioural self-control; Warm and close relationships with the teacher; and Relationships with classmates generate both loneliness and belonging.*

### **School elicits a range of emotions**

A range of emotion descriptors was used to describe school, play, peers, activities, and the teacher, predominantly *happy* or *sad*, but also *great*, *good*, *excited*, *delighted*, *like*, and *love*. There were occasional references to teachers as *mad*, *angry* or *cross*. Bullying or exclusion from play involved being *sad* but also *mad*, *angry*, *cross* or *afraid*.



Overall, being in school elicited very positive emotions: for the first four scenarios – waving goodbye, lining up, showing the class, and sitting in class – 20 or more participants described happiness or another positive emotion: *'Happy because I'm goin' to school'*. Infrequently, sadness at separation from parents was described, *'They'll miss them... their mammy'*, [after saying goodbye] *'... they'll run after them'*. For some, sadness co-existed with positive feelings, *'I feel happy but sometimes I miss my mammy in school'*, or understanding that play could distract, *'I miss my mam and my dad... We just keep playing and then if you forget you'll still be happy'*, reflecting emotion awareness and self-regulation.

For the remaining scenarios, sentiment was less positive. Just half the children felt positive about sitting alone writing at a desk, or about going into the yard (playground) with a friend, *'cause he's no one to play with'*. The final three scenarios generated predominantly negative feelings. Going to the toilet was positive for only 10 of the 25 children: 7 mentioned *'bursting'* and fear of *'waiting too long'*; others described anxiety about going to the toilet alone. Only 10 children were happy about being outside and watching others play; many appeared fearful of rejection or anxious about being alone: *'cause you can see there is no one beside her and that means she has no one to play with'*.

Finally, children's emotion responses were particularly rich for the last scenario: being pushed in the playground. Regarding the child being pushed, most (19 of 25) thought he or she would feel *'hurt'*, *'angry'*, *'sad'*, or *'mad'*. Thirteen participants thought the bully felt good (*'great'*, *'happy'* or *'liked it'*), whereas 9 said the bully was *'angry'*, *'sad'*, *'cross'* or *'evil'*; 17 thought onlookers felt *'sad'*, *'mad'*, *'bad'* or *'cross'* whereas just 3 attributed happiness to them. For the bullying scenario, 18 children said they would tell the teacher if they were sad (more so than for others), but only 10 thought the teacher would be available to intervene, or that the bullies would get into trouble. Several said their teacher would be in the classroom or having lunch – giving a sense, from children's perspectives, of a lack of oversight in the playground.

### ***School provides food, books, and toys***

Seven participants specifically mentioned the resources they receive in school such as breakfast or lunch (only provided in schools in economically deprived communities): *'I feel good... because I get breakfast in school'*; *'I think they'll feel happy to go in, cause they might be hungry'*. Pleasure was expressed about books and toys: *'School is the best, ... because you get to play with anything you want or read books, any books you want'*, and one child

compared home negatively: *'When I got home I be sad a bit. I be sad a bit cause I love school better than home, cause home has no doctor sets and I love doctor sets'*.

### ***Feeling competent in play, drawing, and learning***

Participants' references to early learning activities were strongly focused on play and drawing/art across scenarios: in contrast to work (cited 9 times) or writing, reading or numbers (22 times), play was cited 50 times, and drawing, colouring or art 33 times. Children referred to play generically, rarely specifying games. Positive play references were classroom-based: *'Then you get to sit down and play with your stuff'* and playground-based: *'They get to play and run out yard'*. Interestingly, play, although central, was not always positive; negative peer experiences, all playground-based, were common. These are described below in the *Relationships with classmates* theme.

Overall, where children mentioned class-based activities they seemed confident in their ability, e.g., expressing pride at being good at an activity, and getting recognition from peers: *'Because he's tellin' everyone [his news] and they're goin' to go and say "very good"'*, as well as from teachers: *'He would tell the teacher because he is good at writing'*. Just one child was consistently negative about her ability regarding drawing, work, and not being able to read yet.

### ***School provides structure and expectations of behavioural self-control***

Across scenarios, children's responses indicated good knowledge of the school routines they must grasp, and the behaviours they must engage in, through the course of the day: going in and out of class and the yard, hanging up coats and bags, tidying toys, having lunch, going to the toilet, sitting down, standing up, and bringing work to the teacher. Two participants, when asked what would happen next, gave a full summary of the day: *'Maybe she will be doing English with her teacher, then reading a book and then out in the yard and then home time?'*. Also indicating the routinised, structured nature of the school day, children used terms such as *'yard time'* or *'tidy up time'* and used teachers' language to describe their activities and attitudes, indicating active engagement, such as *'I want to play with my partners'* or *'Look, I have my ears open'*.

### ***Warm and close relationships with the teacher***

Most children described trusting and warm relationships with their teachers, enjoying classroom activities: *'Teacher does loads of fun stuff with them and they loves their teacher'*,

and feeling safe: *'Cause they love, cause ...they really, really like school so much and the teacher is nice and you can, you don't have to be afraid'*. Just 2 of the 25 children consistently indicated that the teacher might be angry, saying that the child in the image was *'Very listening and the teacher won't give out to her'* [be cross] or *'They feel happy and the teacher won't be mad'*.

Children had a good understanding of disciplinary practices, saying teachers may do the following: *'ask them to stop'*; *'giving out'* [being cross] or *'shouting'*; issue a *'time out'* or a *'red card'*; send offenders to another room, the office or the principal; withdraw privileges (*'no more art'*); or not allow children to remain in the school. Apart from these references however, there was little mention of rules and discipline, with teachers described as supportive and encouraging, e.g., giving children stickers or a thumbs-up for work well done, and being a source of help with difficult feelings. Several described the teacher as a person to confide in: *'If you're sad, you're to tell the teacher'*. One described the teacher as a confidante, akin to friends and family: *'Everybody likes to tell things to their teachers, their friends, their mummies, and daddies, and uncles and everybody in the family'*.

#### ***Relationships with classmates generate both loneliness and belonging***

Finally, peer relationships were highly salient, but generated mixed emotions. A substantial number of children described uncertainty and sadness regarding interactions, or lack thereof, with peers. Even before the bullying scenario was discussed, many negatively-toned statements about peers and play were recorded: *'She will play out in the yard and no one will play with her and then she will be sad'*. Several described being lonely: *'He has no one to play with, he has no one to speak to'*; experiencing conflict: *'Their friends are ... mad at him'*; or being excluded: *'She asked can she play and that little girl said no'*.

At the same time, other participants did enjoy peer interactions. Several described traditional games such as *'eeny meeny miny moe'*; *'duck, duck, goose'*; *'tip tap'*, *'ring a ring a rosie'*. Children rarely spoke of 'friends', but several were confident that their classmates would let them join in games: *'He is going to say, "can I do it with ya", and they will say "yeah"... he knows they are going to say yes'*. This appeared to pay off in terms of relationships, but also in children's learning: *'I ask people can I play with them... cause it gives me new ideas as well, what I can play'*.

## Discussion

This study of children's views of the first year in school in an economically deprived community of Dublin, Ireland, presents a picture of school factors that may support or impede early resilience. Children, aged on average 5 years 2 months, described predominantly strong, positive feelings about school, frequently citing opportunities for play and drawing, and warm relationships with their teachers, suggesting school processes that facilitate resilience. Yet risks were also evident. Half or more children associated negative emotions or anxiety regarding joining in with peers, yard (playground) interactions, a sense of teachers' absence in the yard, using the toilet, and the effects and consequences, or lack thereof, of bullying.

Overall, these positive feelings and stressors about school reflect findings in other communities (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004; Harrison & Murray, 2015; Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000; Peters, 2003). However, two notable differences were found. First, children were appreciative of the food, books and toys that school provided, sometimes comparing these favourably with supplies at home. This may reflect resource-poor home environments and school's compensatory potential. Second, there was a lack of emphasis on school rules and a greater focus on play (Dockett & Perry, 2001): children showed a clear grasp of behavioural self-control required to comply with school routines and an awareness of disciplinary procedures, yet play-based descriptions of school activity were far more prevalent, not just for break time but also for class settings. This contrasts with other studies in Ireland and internationally where children distinguished work from play (Brooker, 2008). A possible reason may be that the two participating schools were in the process of implementing a pilot programme, Play to Learn (Preparing for Life, 2014), which encourages teachers to embed play into the curriculum, introducing extended daily play sessions and adapting classrooms for play.

To consider whether children's responses in this study indicate resilience-supporting school ecologies, we draw on themes noted by Doll et al. (2014) and Theron and Theron (2014), summarised earlier (here, in italics). Children's mentions of food, toys and books indicate schools provide *access to material resources*. Numerous references to classroom free play indicate that children are experiencing opportunities for *academic self-determination through self-selected learning goals* through play in the class context. *Academic efficacy* was evident primarily in play, and (though mentioned less frequently) in confidence in writing and numbers. *A sense of competence, acknowledged by others*, was evident as children enjoyed showing their work and anticipated recognition from both peers

and teachers. Whether this would eventually lead to a *powerful identity* is too early to determine.

For *behavioural self-control*, the evidence was more mixed. Children were clearly familiar with the discipline of the school routine – times, lines, bags, tidying up, etc. Yet there was considerable anxiety about using the toilet, and descriptions of bullying indicated that some children or classmates may find behavioural restraint difficult. When considering the necessity for *a sense of social justice with experience of fair treatment* as part of resilience-building, it is of considerable concern that only a minority of children were confident that bullies would be stopped.

Children's many references to loving and trusting their teachers clearly indicate *caring and authentic teacher-child relationships* and *constructive relationships and positive connection with others*. In some cases there was also a nascent sense of *rewarding friendships*, yet for many children, access to enriching peer interactions seemed to bring considerable challenge. Finally, there was little evidence of *strong home-school relationships* in children's responses. This may be an artefact of the PMSSW, where only the first image (waving goodbye) refers to home. In other parts of the CTSS, children talked about family, who informed them about school before they started, and helped with homework and learning at home (O'Rourke et al., 2014).

Findings therefore indicate that many resilience-supporting mechanisms were evident in these children's early school experiences, among them play opportunities and positive teacher and peer interactions. However, stressors were also found, particularly uncertainty with peers and experiences of bullying. Bullying is of particular concern as longitudinal data show that bullying magnifies existing negative effects of socio-economically deprived environments (Schwartz, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2013).

In considering the implications of the findings for school psychologists seeking to attend to resilience-promoting processes, some strengths and weaknesses of the study should be considered. Non-responding families may be less engaged with the school community, thus the sample may not reflect children experiencing the most disadvantage. The White Irish sample, which reflected the local community, may benefit from connectedness with dominant Irish culture. Yet Irish society and schools are becoming more diverse (Duncan & Humphreys, 2015), and cultural adherence and ethnoracial identification are particularly important for school engagement and resilience for migrant and minority children (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013). The present study cannot address these issues, as the sample reflected a particular demographic and is relatively small, limiting the generalisability

of the results. Yet the findings may generalise to settings with similar features; and, contextualised by the wider literature, they may also serve to refine theories of school-based resilience (see Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007).

Another limitation was that children did not reply to a large minority of questions and some showed signs of fatigue in response to the repetitive five-question PMSSW format. This mirrors experience of other PMSSW studies (Harrison & Murray, 2015), and a briefer question set would warrant consideration. In addition, providing PMSSW participants with a clear rationale for the multiple questions could be beneficial, as children's understanding of the relevance and purpose of researchers' questions is believed to influence the quality of responses, particularly when questions are repeated (Siegal, 1997). Furthermore, the PMSSW, despite having pictorial prompts, requires verbal ability and emotion recognition, which may be challenging for at-risk children.

On the whole, however, despite some non-responding, the PMSSW images provided a successful talking point with these young children, suggesting it shows good potential as a structured yet adaptable tool, and can provide opportunities for research in multiple cultural settings, or as a conversation aid in practice contexts. Coupling it with modes of communication such as drawing might cater for children's varying preferences/abilities and increase the range of responses. Further studies should explore early school experience in communities where extra play-based activities are not delivered, and employ less homogenous samples and longitudinal designs (Harrison & Murray, 2015).

### ***Recommendations***

In conclusion, applying the principle that practitioners must be cognisant of children's own interpretations of their experience (Wessells, 2015), we make five recommendations for school psychologists, where school, cultural or economic settings indicate that the findings of the present study may be transferable. For countries with few school psychologists (Jimerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas, & Malone, 2009), other members of school communities may advocate for these proposals (Morrison, You, Sharkey, Felix, & Griffiths, 2013).

First, children's pervasive, positive references to play, as an integral part of their school experience, were notable in this study. Pellegrini and Blatchford (2000, p. 46) describe play as the 'quintessential developmental activity of childhood' and as a vital school experience, yet they caution that its application in education settings requires research. We encourage school psychologists, alongside teachers and policymakers, to consider the

empirical merit of in-class play models promoting self-directed, play-based classroom learning, and to evaluate the effectiveness of such approaches prior to further roll-out.

Second, children in this study expressed substantial anxiety about using toilets. This has occasionally been noted regarding school transitions (Peters, 2010), and has consequences for both physical and psychological well-being (Vernon, Lundblad, & Hellström, 2003), yet is rarely attended to regarding school experience (Burton, 2013). Thus, we recommend that psychologists work with the whole school community to create conditions for young children to feel confident about asking to go to the toilet and to feel safe in using it.

Our final three recommendations relate to children's negative feelings about playground peer relationships and lack of confidence that bullying will be addressed. Although all school environments can enhance social competence by actively fostering warm relationships, encouraging participation, and providing clarity about boundaries and rules (Toland & Carrigan, 2011), children in low-income families may need more intensive training to develop social-emotional skills, preferably before age 7, when meta-analysis indicates that curricular socio-emotional learning (SEL) programmes are more effective (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011). Therefore, we recommend that, together with teachers and other relevant education professionals, school psychologists support the implementation and delivery of curricular SEL programmes in disadvantaged communities in the first year of school.

Social and emotional competence is also required beyond the classroom, particularly in the playground where more bullying takes place (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). Where schools provide enjoyable, developmentally appropriate games and where 'active' adult supervision is provided, children fight and break rules less, and interact and play more (Doll & Brehm, 2010). Active supervision entails playground supervisors commenting on play; occasionally participating; and interacting with children behaving appropriately, not just with those misbehaving (Doll & Brehm, 2010). We therefore recommend that school psychologists support the development of constructive outdoor play and active playground supervision.

Our final recommendation is that school psychologists support teachers to co-develop constructive strategies regarding peer victimisation. Without training about addressing bullying, evidence indicates that teachers rarely intervene, or that their advice (e.g., to ignore aggressive children) may increase exclusion (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015). School psychologists could work with teachers to understand a classroom's peer ecology,

diminish popularity-focused hierarchies, cultivate friendships among aggressive and nonaggressive children, and foster whole school norms of standing up to peer aggression (Troop-Gordon, 2015). They could also advocate for teacher training programmes on bullying, as evidence indicates that such training has particular benefits for children experiencing economic risk (Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008). Extending strategies to communities and families, for example by promoting parent-child relationships, may reap further success in mitigating bullying behaviours (Bowes et al., 2009).

In conclusion, this study sheds new light on socio-economically disadvantaged children's appraisals of the early school environmental factors that may promote and constrain resilience. The arising recommendations provide important direction, and opportunity for reflection, for school psychologists and other school personnel seeking to develop resilience-enabling school ecologies for a critical juncture in disadvantaged children's education and development.

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